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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 33rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 109: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES; QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/C.3/50/L.26/Rev.1)

1. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that in the wake of recent large-scale emergencies, there had been growing recognition by the international community that a new approach to meeting refugees' needs was required. Although providing protection to and finding solutions for millions of refugees was still the core of her Office's mandate, the international community no longer wanted UNHCR to wait for people to cross borders before it offered to protect and assist them. Growing emphasis was being placed on providing humanitarian assistance and protection and creating conditions conducive to early solutions in countries of origin. Her Office was also increasingly pursuing preventive action to contain the causes of displacement or at least to mitigate its consequences.

2. Her Office had a mandate to provide international protection to refugees, which necessitated working with Governments to keep borders open for those fleeing from persecution and war and ensuring that refugees were not returned against their will to dangerous situations. At the meeting of the UNHCR Executive Committee in October 1995, she had expressed concern at the growing reluctance of States to grant asylum, even on a temporary basis. Some countries were closing their borders, while others were introducing laws which would effectively deny admission.

3. The best solution to refugee problems had always been return to countries of origin, although third-country resettlement should continue to be available for some categories of refugees. Large numbers of refugees and displaced persons had in fact returned to their places of origin over the past five years, but increasingly, refugees were returning to situations where peace and stability had yet to be established fully after long periods of conflict and devastation. Although return was usually preferable to a prolonged stay in exile under dangerous and intolerable conditions, the key principle in promoting return should be its voluntary nature. Her Office strove to protect the interests of returning refugees by contributing to reconciliation and recovery in their places of origin.

4. In the absence of a peace settlement, official assurances that refugees could return without fear of repression or persecution were important confidence-building measures, but were often insufficient. An international presence was frequently needed to monitor safety and reassure returnees, while working with the authorities to ensure that communities were in a position to welcome returnees and move towards recovery. Confidence-building measures promoted return, while return could build confidence in long-term reconciliation and peace-building in countries still ravaged by conflict.

5. Operating in the midst of conflict was very difficult. In the former Yugoslavia, her Office had been powerless to stop some of the worst human rights atrocities in the history of the United Nations. Return to places of origin and

respect for humanitarian principles and human rights should be made a condition for reconstruction assistance and membership in the international community.

6. Much time and effort had been invested in improving emergency response capacity. Any discussion on reforming humanitarian activities should focus on the collective efforts of the humanitarian community rather than on individual institutions. Managers had a responsibility to improve procedures and continually review institutional constraints. However, UNHCR also had a responsibility to fine-tune its response to broader efforts to respond to complex emergencies. She therefore welcomed the recent call by the Economic and Social Council for a comprehensive review of the emergency response capacity of the United Nations system.

7. The issue of prevention was complex. Preventive efforts and their results often went unseen, while their failure was all too visible in each successive humanitarian emergency. Humanitarian action could alleviate suffering and buy time for negotiators to continue their political efforts, but it could not be an end in itself. The Security Council and other political bodies should act on early warning signals and try to prevent or resolve emerging conflicts. The causes of conflicts must be addressed and solutions to them resolutely sought if humanitarian activities were not to be left to operate in isolation and continue indefinitely.

8. She was deeply concerned that the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel did not extend automatic protection to all staff of the United Nations risking their lives for peace. The safety of humanitarian staff must be a prime consideration. In that regard, she was dismayed at the international community's inability to take a clear stand on the question of land-mines, which were a threat to everyone. She joined the Secretary-General in calling for a total ban on the production, use and export of land-mines. UNHCR was now implementing a policy, announced in July 1995, of refusing to do business with companies involved in the production or sale of those weapons.

9. In recent years, the United Nations had demonstrated its capacity for effective humanitarian action. Such action was not charity, however, but an integral part of working for peace. When the United Nations had been founded in 1945, its declared purpose had been to reaffirm the world's faith in "fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small". The current search for solutions to the refugee problem must be guided by the same principles.

10. Sir John WESTON (United Kingdom) inquired as to the position of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the proposed review of the emergency response capacity of the United Nations. In what ways did she think coordination and reaction speed could be improved?

11. Mr. WAHBI (Sudan) said that all countries which received refugees deserved some consideration, because of the adverse effects on national resources, the environment and social structures. Adequate international assistance was required to alleviate the burden borne by those countries, particularly when, as

in the case of the Sudan, the host country was a least developed country with an enormous refugee population. She wondered whether there was any way for the level of assistance to such countries to be determined more equitably.

12. Mr. TIRIRETE (Burundi) said that his Government was extremely grateful to UNHCR for the help and support provided to Burundi in recent months, including the High Commissioner's visit to his country. The refugee problem in Burundi was particularly complex, but the most disturbing aspect was the presence in eastern Zaire of many heavily armed "refugees" who posed a threat to peace and security in the subregion. He wondered what measures were being considered to deal with that problem.

13. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), replying to the representative of the United Kingdom, said that emergency response was a process which should be considered from all angles. Emergency response capacity had been improved, as had been demonstrated in April 1994 when a quarter of a million Rwandan refugees had fled to Tanzania. In order to be prepared for such an emergency, there must be ready access to sufficient trained staff, stockpiled goods and emergency funds. Coordination had been improved between UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), but amalgamating their activities would destroy the three agencies by removing some of their capabilities. Much more thought must be given to the issue before any decision could be taken on amalgamation.

14. Replying to the representative of the Sudan, she said that she had tried to alert the international community to the heavy burden placed on host countries which received large numbers of refugees. However, money was allocated on a project-by-project basis, not according to the number of beneficiaries. She had advocated giving development assistance to host communities.

15. Replying to the representative of Burundi, she said that the presence of armed elements was a serious problem to which the best and only solution was peace and reconciliation. Refugee camps should be exclusively civilian. There were 41 camps in eastern Zaire from which armed elements had been barred, offering at least some reassurance to refugees. Talks must be organized between host countries and countries of origin and camps must be assured of adequate food and security.

16. Mr. AQUARONE (Netherlands) asked what kind of cooperation existed between UNHCR and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

17. Mrs. CHICAGA (Zambia) said that the best protection for refugees was a lasting peace which enabled them to return home. In that connection, she requested further information on the rationale for third-country resettlement and on whether it was a purely stopgap measure.

18. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs was a coordinating rather than an operational body. Its work was very useful in bringing agencies together and in pooling information.

18. Third-country settlement was a solution that was both useful and necessary in cases where it was impossible for refugees to return to their countries or communities of origin. One example was the very complex situation in the former Yugoslavia, where it was expected that at least 20,000 people would be unable to return to their homes for reasons of safety and would therefore have to be resettled.

Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.20/Rev.1

19. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.20/Rev.1, entitled "Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees".

20. Mr. NEWELL (Secretary of the Committee) said that two changes had been made to the draft resolution. In the seventh line of paragraph 9, after the words "calls upon", the text should read "the Office of the High Commissioner, within its mandate and at the request of the Government concerned, to strengthen ". At the end of paragraph 14 should read "... acquisition of another nationality, while at the same time recognizing the right of States to establish laws governing the acquisition, renunciation or loss of nationality".

21. Mr. MIFFLEIN (Denmark), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors, said that Algeria, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Paraguay, Peru, Swaziland, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe had joined the sponsors.

22. The draft resolution was the result of a long process of dialogue and consultation. It contained several paragraphs on the root causes of displacement and on possible solutions. He hoped that the Committee would adopt the draft resolution without a vote.

AGENDA ITEM 110: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN (continued) (A/50/141, A/50/215-S/1995/475, A/50/456, A/50/537, A/50/672)

AGENDA ITEM 111: PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE (continued) (A/50/511, A/50/565)

24. Ms. BELLAMY (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)), speaking on agenda item 110, said that the States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child currently numbered 181. She urged the Governments of the 10 remaining States to ratify the Convention as a matter of urgency.

25. Although UNICEF was proud to have helped save the lives of some 25 million children world wide since the early 1980s, through its focus on child survival, a new challenge had arisen: "survival for what?". If an acceptable answer was to be found, factors such as rapid economic and political change, environmental degradation, deteriorating living standards, vast disparities between rich and poor, dismantling of social services, breakdown of traditional social support structures and rising violence, crime, intolerance and hatred must be taken into account. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provided the best answer by

outlining the obligations of Governments and individuals to ensure that every child had a decent chance to fulfil his or her potential.

26. UNICEF field offices and National Committees world wide were working to make the Convention a rallying point for progressive change. Laws, judicial systems and even constitutions were being brought into line with its provisions; national children's commissions had been created, special ombudsmen's offices for children had been established; the Convention had been included in school curricula, often in local languages; and Governments' contacts with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child had led to changes in public policy in many countries.

27. There was increasing concern about child labour and innovative solutions were being sought. In Bangladesh, measures were being taken to end child labour in the garment industry, and India had recently announced its goal of eliminating exploitative and hazardous child labour by the year 2025.

28. The plight of children in situations of armed conflict was to be a central theme of the forthcoming State of the World's Children report; efforts were under way in over 30 countries to restore some measure of normality to the lives of children, relieve their psychological trauma and reunite them with their families. UNICEF was involved in peace education, reintegration of child soldiers, land-mine awareness campaigns and special initiatives in support of girls and women, who were often deliberately targeted by combatants. At the global level, it was pushing for a ban on anti-personnel land-mines, an optional protocol to the Convention raising to 18 the minimum age of recruitment into armed forces, and a reordering of priorities away from military spending towards investment in human development.

29. UNICEF was working with Governments and non-governmental organizations in a number of countries to combat child sexual exploitation and help its victims. Efforts had also been made, through legal reform, training and large-scale campaigns, to rescue young children from official "non-existence" by ensuring that their names were entered in civil registries. In the wake of the Beijing Conference, efforts to make equality and empowerment a reality for all girls and women must continue. Lastly, all children should be able to participate in decisions affecting their lives; no parent should feel threatened by the notion that children had rights.

30. Whereas the twentieth century had begun with children having virtually no rights, children's rights were now recognized by the most powerful, wide-ranging and widely accepted human rights instrument. The international community must work together to make respect for the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as universal as its ratification.

31. Ms. QUISUMBING (Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), speaking on behalf of the expert appointed by the Secretary-General to undertake a study of the impact on children of armed conflict, said that the study had reached its halfway point and that a final report would be submitted to the next session of the General Assembly, with recommendations on how to improve the protection and care of children in situations of armed conflict. Over the past year, the expert had travelled to

Angola, Cambodia, Lebanon, Rwanda and Sierra Leone and had conducted regional consultations in various parts of Africa and the Arab region. Research had been undertaken in thematic areas such as child soldiers, land-mines, nutrition, education for peace, internally displaced children and minority and indigenous children affected by armed conflict.

32. The Convention on the Rights of the Child served as the framework for the study. In the light of the Convention, the atrocities from which children suffered in wartime were clearly violations of their human rights. Further ways must be explored whereby the Convention and other international instruments might be used to guarantee the security and dignity of children caught in internal conflicts. The expert was looking for ways to increase the responsibility of Governments and often parties to conflicts to protect the well-being of children in conflict situations, and to identify the lineages between international humanitarian law and human rights law and find ways to strengthen existing instruments. She supported the adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that would increase the age of military recruitment to 18 years and prohibit the direct or indirect participation of children in conflicts and hostilities.

33. Armed conflicts were taking place throughout the world, but especially in Africa and Eastern Europe. Nothing was spared in the quest for power and resources, not even hospitals, places of worship, crops, schools, women or children. Children and women were often the deliberate targets of genocide in both rural and urban areas. Children had also become perpetrators of atrocities and, in Rwanda, would for the first time in history stand trial for genocide.

34. Between 1970 and 1987 in the main areas of conflict in Africa, 92 per cent of all fatalities had been civilians, mainly women and children. While some children were coerced, forcibly recruited or simply followed their brothers, fathers or family to the front lines, others "chose" to become soldiers as a way to secure food, community and protection. In some countries, Governments and armed opposition groups justified the recruitment of children on the basis of culture, religion and strategic necessity. In others, highly politicized children and youth articulated with force and passion their motivation to take up arms. In Liberia, an estimated 6,000 children had been recruited by militias, and in Sierra Leone, some of the worst atrocities had been committed by some of the estimated 25,000 children who had taken up arms in a bitter civil conflict.

35. Reiterating the call for the complete demobilization of all child soldiers under the age of 18 in all countries, she stressed the importance of programmes aimed at demobilizing and reintegrating child combatants. In order to prevent remobilization and the return of former combatants to street life and criminal activity, all humanitarian relief and development interventions should include programmes that focused on the psychological recovery and social reintegration of child soldiers. The effectiveness of specific programmes was often related to the involvement of local communities, institutions and families in their design and implementation. Other key elements included the incorporation of local traditions of coping, healing and survival, a focus on the re-establishment of trust and self-esteem, peace and reconciliation, a secure economic base, reunification with family and community and a safe environment.

16. Children must be considered untouchable at all times and especially in vulnerable situations. Positive experiences in El Salvador, Lebanon and the Sudan had shown that it was possible to safeguard the basic rights of children in conflict situations. The study was exploring ways to create an international obligation to allow access to children in such situations and to make the provision of essential services for children an essential component of humanitarian assistance. Preventive and long-term activities that addressed the structural causes of violence were also being explored.

17. In over 60 countries, there were an estimated 100 million land-mines - one for every 20 children. The use of land-mines violated the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which required States to protect children in armed conflict. Social services in poor countries had minimal capacity to respond to the needs of children disabled and disfigured by land-mines. Once laid, anti-personnel mines could remain active for as long as 50 years and prevent the productive use of lands and roads. The study fully supported the strengthening of the Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby Traps and Other Devices (Protocol II).

18. Although the mandate for the study was to examine the impact of armed conflict on children, it was impossible to ignore the related impact on women. In conflict situations, parents, especially mothers, were critically important to a child's survival and development. Health education, preventive care and counselling were especially important for women and girls who had been raped, undergone female genital mutilation or been forced into prostitution, which made them more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. Women's potential as active agents for peacemaking and conflict resolution must be strengthened. In every forum attended by the expert, the role of women in decision-making had been underscored as an essential first step towards the development of preventive measures. Other measures that the study would explore included education for peace, truth and reconciliation commissions and new perspectives on the role of the military in conflict resolution. While the study sought to mitigate the impact of armed conflict on children, it must also remain focused on efforts to prevent armed conflicts from taking place.

19. The work done was just a beginning. Over the coming months, members of the international community would be called upon to contribute their input, in order to ensure that the study's findings and recommendations reflected the true situation. Field visits would be made and regional consultations would be convened in Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Continued support would be needed to put the issues of children and war at the top of political and development agendas world wide.

40. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO (Burkina Faso) welcomed the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the efforts being made by States, with the assistance of UNICEF, to meet the intermediate objectives set for 1995. UNICEF should be given the necessary resources to enable it to improve the well-being of children throughout the world.

41. Her Government had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 23 July 1990 and had acted promptly to implement it. On 6 April 1993, it had submitted its initial report on the implementation of the Convention to the

Committee on the Rights of the Child. Because of the socio-economic conditions prevailing in her country, there had been an increase in the number of infants abandoned at birth and in the number of street children. The Ministry of Social Action and the Family was taking measures to locate the families of abandoned children or to place them with foster families. Two centres had been built for street children and every effort was being made to reintegrate such children into society by providing them with education and counselling. Special protective measures were also available for children in emergency situations, including refugee children and children affected by natural disasters, epidemics and armed conflict.

42. The report of the Secretary-General on assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors painted a sombre picture. Such assistance should focus on reuniting children with their families or placing them with foster families. One key aspect was to provide them with a suitable environment and the necessary counselling so that they could readjust and recover from their trauma.

43. Her delegation welcomed the efforts made by UNHCR, UNICEF and their partners in the field to provide assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors. Special attention should be paid to the problem of the recruitment of refugee children into armed forces. Serious consideration should be given to providing human rights education and prohibiting volunteer military service by children under age 15 - or under 18, as proposed by the expert. Such measures should be accompanied by activities aimed at helping children to adapt to society and find work. Ill-treatment of refugee children in foster families was another problem that needed to be tackled.

44. Her delegation was deeply concerned about the plight of children affected by armed conflict. The international community must find a comprehensive solution to the question of anti-personnel mines. Not only the use of such mines but also their production should be prohibited. Her delegation commended the efforts of the working group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Such a protocol should help to reduce the participation of children in armed conflicts.

45. The most heinous crimes of the twentieth century were the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. States should take all appropriate measures under the relevant articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to prevent such practices.

46. Her delegation noted with satisfaction the provisional report by the Special Rapporteur on that issue (A/50/456), which proposed a number of strategies and measures that were worth considering. Every assistance should be given to the Special Rapporteur to enable her to fulfil her mandate, especially with regard to the sale of children for military conscription, commercial adoptions and the hiring of surrogate mothers, and the sale of children's organs. Resources must be earmarked at both the national and the international levels to eliminate those abhorrent practices. Her delegation advocated the creation of a voluntary fund for activities to reintegrate children who had been the victims of sale, prostitution, exploitation or sexual tourism and

pornography, especially in the developing countries where those problems were very serious.

47. The victimization of children could be ended by eradicating the many socio-economic problems that caused it and ensuring respect for human rights and the effective implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

48. Mr. BUNE (Fiji), speaking on agenda item 111, said that in implementing General Assembly resolution 48/163, it would be useful to recall that the main objective of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People was to strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in areas such as human rights, the environment, development and health. Indigenous people should be consulted fully and participate effectively in identifying the obstacles to their development and possible solutions.

49. Perhaps the most important objective was the adoption of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. The completion of a draft declaration was, in and of itself, a remarkable achievement. The next step in the process of international standard-setting for indigenous people and their rights would be the negotiation under the United Nations auspices, of a legal convention on the rights of indigenous people.

50. In order to enhance coordination of activities within the United Nations system, Fiji urged Member States to support the indigenous people's unit within the Centre for Human Rights by providing it with resources, including suitably qualified staff. Much more publicity should be given to activities under the Decade and greater attempts should be made to involve the private sector in such efforts. His delegation encouraged the Department of Public Information to undertake a campaign to disseminate as much information as possible about the Decade's objectives and activities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Bretton Woods and other financial institutions should also be encouraged to become involved in the activities of the Decade.

51. In Fiji, the advancement and development of the indigenous Fijian people was a major national policy. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, the Prime Minister of Fiji had stressed the importance of working to redress some of the wrongs that history had wrought upon indigenous peoples and guaranteeing that external values and forces did not continue to impose political concessions, economic reforms and social changes that were not desired by indigenous people themselves.

52. Mr. MABILANGAN (Philippines), speaking on agenda item 111, said that there was a diversity of indigenous groups in the Philippines. His country had been very active in promoting international activities with respect to indigenous people. In honour of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, it had hosted, in April 1993, a global youth summit on the theme "Tribal Youth Partnership for Sustainable Development".

53. His delegation noted with satisfaction the final report on a comprehensive programme of action for the Decade (A/50/511) and noted that the main objective of that programme was to strengthen international cooperation in solving the

problems faced by indigenous people. The report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/50/565 referred, among other measures, to the dissemination of background materials designed to raise public awareness of the problems encountered by indigenous people, including indigenous youth. Those activities tied in well with his country's proposal to host an Indigenous Youth Cultural Olympics. That proposal had been welcomed by the General Assembly in its resolution 49/214 and formed part of the commemorative activities for the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and UNESCO. Its purpose was to reaffirm, through a partnership of indigenous people and youth, the value of traditional cultures and to strengthen international cooperation in solving the problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as the environment, development, human rights, health, education and culture.

54. Mr. TELLO (Mexico) said that his country's indigenous people had made a valuable and diverse contribution to Mexican society but that their centuries-old marginalization was an obstacle to Mexico's overall development. Meeting their demands concerning the administration of justice, land tenure and other political and social rights was an urgent task laid down in the national development plan for the period 1995-2000. Eliminating their extreme poverty was essential to Mexico's modernization process and to strengthening the rule of law and social integration. The plan established the means for building a more united, just and democratic country.

55. His Government was in the process of redefining its relationship with indigenous communities. Legislation was being revised to guarantee respect for the rights of indigenous people as Mexican citizens while protecting their cultural diversity. Increasing their democratic participation in the planning and execution of programmes in their regions, in local government and in productive activities was an essential element of that new relationship.

56. International action was also needed to promote and protect the culture and rights of indigenous people. Within the framework of the Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, his Government had sought to strengthen the capacity of indigenous people to preserve and develop their traditions, and to ensure respect for their forms of organization and community representation. Mexico attached particular importance to the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and supported the activities of the Decade. The international community would have to make decisive efforts to implement them, with the full participation of representatives of indigenous groups from all over the world, and to provide the necessary resources for that purpose.

57. Establishing a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system would enable them to voice their concerns and put forward proposals relating to United Nations activities. That would ensure that such activities met their expectations. Lastly, his Government felt that the adoption of a declaration on the rights of indigenous people would be a very important contribution to the Decade.

58. Ms. SHARFMAN (Israel) said that the International Convention on the Rights of the Child was the most important document of its kind, because it had binding legal authority and because it extended the scope of civil rights to include

children and teenagers and recognized their autonomy. The international community had a vital role to play in protecting the rights of children, who were often the primary victims of war, poverty and natural disasters. Israel welcomed UNICEF efforts to safeguard the welfare of children and promote their rights around the world.

59. Her country's laws on the rights of children focused primarily on protecting them from harm and ensuring their welfare. A considerable amount of legislation had been passed regarding parents' obligations to their children, children's rights, protection by the family from injury, special consideration for the family unit, and child labour. In recent years, intensive efforts had been made to pass legislation regarding harm to and abuse of minors. Under a law to prevent the abuse of minors and the helpless, every person who had reason to fear that a child was being abused must inform the appropriate authorities. Any professional who failed to report child abuse was guilty of a criminal offence.

60. Her delegation strongly believed in the role that public organizations could play in safeguarding children's welfare. The National Council for the Child performed a central role in protecting children's rights on a day-to-day basis, through legislative involvement and by mobilizing public awareness. In January 1991, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and Youth had been established to protect any child who felt deprived, abused or injured at home, in school or in his or her neighbourhood. Hundreds of children, parents and teachers had registered complaints with the Office, which had the power to look into any case where the rights of children were endangered. Lastly, she stressed the need to safeguard not only the social rights of minors, including their rights to education, health and a home, but also their civil rights, including freedom of expression and organization.

61. Mr. FERNANDEZ PALACIOS (Cuba) said that his country attached particular importance to achieving the objectives of the 1990 World Summit for Children. Many of the Summit's goals had long been attained in Cuba, where the Government had made enormous efforts to guarantee universal free education and health care for the entire population, particularly children. As a result, infant mortality had been lowered significantly, childhood diseases had been eliminated and there was 100 per cent enrolment in primary education.

62. His delegation urged the few States which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in order to ensure its universal ratification by the end of 1995. In addition to ratification, however, there was a need for more decisive action at the national and international level, at a time when certain ultra-conservative and racist groups were seeking to impose discriminatory legislation that denied access to basic educational and health services to children of immigrants, in flagrant violation of their most basic human rights.

63. Throughout the world, there were grave threats to the welfare of children, including child prostitution, child pornography, child labour, armed conflicts, the illegal sale of children's organs for transplants, and high infant mortality from curable diseases.

64. Cuba welcomed the appointment of the new Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and reiterated its support for the work of the expert appointed to study the impact on children of armed conflict. Given the persistence of those problems, progress must be made in the drafting of optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Together with other delegations, his delegation had endeavoured to draw up a draft omnibus resolution based on a more indecisive approach and a renewed political commitment, which covered all the problems affecting the normal development of the world's children. He urged all delegations to join in that effort and to adopt the draft resolution by consensus.

65. Mr. JULL (Australia) said that his Government recognized the need for an ongoing effort to achieve the goals of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. As part of its commitment to developing and monitoring the national programme of action, his Government would shortly be conducting a mid-term review, and a report would be prepared for submission to the United Nations in 1996. Many millions of the world's children continued to suffer from poor health, lack of education, exploitation and human rights violations. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was only a first step and must be followed by serious efforts to fulfil the obligations undertaken.

66. In implementing the Convention, considerably more needed to be done to improve children's health and to end child labour and the sexual exploitation of children. Although important advances had been made in combating killer diseases and reducing child mortality and morbidity, all countries must continue to give priority to investing in the physical, mental and emotional development of their children. His Government was acutely conscious of the particular difficulties facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and was committed to redressing those inequalities. The link between children's health and women's health and education, as well as the broader context in which the promotion of children's health was to be pursued, must be kept in mind.

67. Many millions of children were forced to work in ways that destroyed their childhood. Protecting children from exploitative labour was closely linked to ensuring their right to education. The phenomenon of exploitative child labour could be tackled through coherent, practical strategies. National Governments were responsible for implementing such strategies, and international programmes could assist national efforts to address the underlying causes of child labour. Australia was committed to the search for practical responses to the problem of exploitative child labour and had established a high-level working group to look at ways of protecting and promoting core labour standards.

68. The sexual exploitation of children was one of the greatest infringements of their human rights. Although there were few accurate statistics on the incidence of such abuse, the problem was widespread and deeply entrenched. The organized abuse of children flourished even in countries with well developed law-enforcement systems. Several countries had enacted laws which made it possible to prosecute citizens for sex crimes committed abroad, and some people had already been convicted under such laws. Australia had enacted the Crimes

(Child Sex Tourism) Amendment Act, which dealt with the activities of Australian paedophiles who travelled overseas for the purpose of exploiting children sexually and which targeted organizers of the overseas tours on which Australians engaged in sexual activity with minors. The first Australian to be charged under the Act was currently awaiting trial. Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) was a deadly reality for children who were mercilessly exploited for profit by lucrative markets catering to domestic and so-called "tourist" groups. It was also necessary to bear in mind the particular disadvantages faced by the girl child in that regard and the need to protect her rights.

69. His Government was especially concerned that efforts to achieve the objectives of the World Summit for Children and the Convention would in many countries be seriously impeded by armed conflict, and it looked forward to the study to be submitted on that subject in 1996.

70. Mr. SALEH (Bahrain) said that concern for children was the very foundation of concern for mankind. In view of the importance of children to society, concern for them and their rights was a universal responsibility. Bahrain had established a social affairs department within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to coordinate efforts to provide children with favourable living conditions. At the family level, maternal and child welfare centres played an important role in family matters. Bahrain had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

71. His delegation had read with interest the report of the Secretary-General on concrete measures taken to alleviate the situation of children in armed conflict (A/50/672) and commended the efforts made by the United Nations to protect children in times of both war and peace. It welcomed Commission on Human Rights resolution 1994/91, which had established a working group to elaborate a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

72. He was deeply concerned that half of the world's refugee population were children. The fact that 1.5 million children had been killed in the past decade as a direct result of war was one of the most shocking features of the age. Every effort should be made to counteract trafficking in children and their use in pornography. Greater coordination among United Nations bodies was needed to rid the world of such social aberrations.

73. Ms. HORIUCHI (Japan) said that the rights of children involved many related issues, such as children in armed conflict, exploitative child labour, the sale of children and child prostitution and pornography. All the relevant organs and mechanisms of the United Nations system, as well as non-governmental organizations, would have to participate in the immense task of eradicating the numerous underlying causes. In the field of human rights, few international instruments had elicited such massive support as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She urged all Governments which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention promptly and all States parties to cooperate fully with the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

74. Governments, in cooperation with international and non-governmental organizations, should take action to eliminate the root causes of practices which discriminated against the girl child, such as female genital mutilation, prenatal sex selection and female infanticide.

75. Her delegation was concerned about the effects of armed conflict on children in many parts of the world and welcomed the progress report on that subject. Child labour, particularly in its most hazardous and exploitative forms, was another source of concern. Eradication of that problem was a primary responsibility of States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which article 32 of which urged the adoption of all necessary legislative, administrative, social and educational measures. Every effort should be made at the international level to enable all children to attend school rather than being forced to work.

76. Lastly, careful consideration should be given to the Special Rapporteur's recommendations for urgent national, local and international measures to deal with the problem of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

77. Mr. MOHIDEEN (Malaysia) agreed with the Coordinator of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People that solving the complex problems faced by indigenous people was a long-term undertaking.

78. The problems confronting indigenous people in different parts of the world varied in nature. In cases where they managed their own affairs, there was a compelling need to integrate other indigenous people into the mainstream of national development, while the situation of indigenous people living in reservations or homelands called for urgent action by the international community. Indigenous people should not be neglected or trivialized as objects of tourism, or should the globalization of national priorities be allowed to deflect from the national commitment to accord full rights to indigenous people.

79. The programme of activities of the Decade of the world's indigenous people should be action-oriented and involve not only indigenous people but also Governments, private enterprise, civic society, the United Nations system and, in particular, the specialized agencies.

80. He drew attention to the importance of the objectives enumerated in annex I to document A/48/511, particularly that of educating non-indigenous societies concerning the situation, cultures, languages, rights and aspirations of indigenous people. The Working Group on Indigenous Populations could play a useful role by periodically reviewing activities undertaken during the Decade, with overall evaluation to be undertaken by the Economic and Social Council.

81. He agreed that it was necessary to establish an indigenous people's unit, but felt that the Coordinator and the Centre for Human Rights should essentially liaise with other United Nations bodies and Governments. Training should cover areas that helped prepare indigenous people to meet the challenges of the modern world. A roster of indigenous experts could be useful, but the appointment of an advisory group to assist the coordinator should be subject to prior approval by Member States.

82. He agreed with the activities proposed for Member States, which must be in conformity with the respective national policies and legislation. Due attention should be given to the particular problems faced by indigenous people. The activities proposed for indigenous organizations, non-governmental organizations and others must be practicable and the business sector could also play a role in enhancing the social and economic status of indigenous people.

83. The primary focus of the Decade should be deliberations on the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people and the promotion of activities which would significantly improve their situation in the areas of education, health and development, taking a step-by-step approach in a partnership of Governments, indigenous people, the United Nations system, private enterprise and civil society.

84. Turning to agenda item 110, the progress made in implementing the Plan of Action of the 1990 World Summit for Children indicated that, although considerable headway had been made in reducing the incidence of diseases such as measles and poliomyelitis, much remained to be done in the areas of education and poverty eradication. All Governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations needed to strengthen their commitment to improving the children's lives, particularly their health, nutrition, education and support systems.

85. Malaysia was among the 18 countries that had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child; most provisions of the Convention had already been implemented in Malaysia and were reflected in its national and local socio-economic and environmental policies.

86. Although the Convention called for the protection of children during armed conflicts, the tragic case of Bosnia-Herzegovina demonstrated that international efforts to protect children from the ravages of war had failed. Increased international efforts must be made to provide assistance and relief to children of war. In addition to the study on the impact on children of armed conflict, his delegation would like to see concrete measures to protect children and identify ways of promoting their post-conflict physical and psychological recovery and reintegration into their communities and families.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.